Understanding through Context: How a Thematic Based Curriculum Can Benefit CGSOC Students

A Monograph

by

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The ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that future conflicts may be fought in multiple domains and consist of many interconnected systems. As such, Army officers must possess a firm understanding of their operational environment and how military operations change that operational environment. With the introduction of PMESII-PT into doctrine, the Army identified eight systems that its says comprise the operational environment. While changes to doctrine often reflect reality in the field, they often drive changes in the Army's education system. Such a change is necessary at the Command and General Staff Officer course. Currently, the CGSOC curriculum is integrated vertically, where courses and lessons relate to the academic department in which they are contained. When examined from a student's perspective, the CGSOC looks very different. One consequence of focusing on integrating the curriculum vertically makes horizontal integration more problematic. What is lost on the student is a sense of context. Instead of contributing to the student's understanding of the material, curriculum organization often detracts from such an understanding. To solve this problem, one method that has been adopted by liberal arts undergraduate institutions, business schools, and medical schools is the thematic-based curriculum. Such an approach imparts on the student the sense of context that is so important to facilitate understanding. This monograph identifies how such a curriculum can be applied to the CGSOC.

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Abstract

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH CONTEXT: HOW A THEMATIC BASED CURRICULUM CAN BENEFIT CGSOC STUDENTS by MAJ David M. Conner, US Army, 51 Pages.

The ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated that future conflicts may be fought in multiple domains and consist of many interconnected systems. As such, Army officers must possess a firm understanding of their operational environment and how military operations change that operational environment. With the introduction of PMESII-PT into doctrine, the Army identified eight systems that its says comprise the operational environment. While changes to doctrine often reflect reality in the field, they often drive changes in the Army's education system. Such a change is necessary at the Command and General Staff Officer course. Currently, the CGSOC curriculum is integrated vertically, where courses and lessons relate to the academic department in which they are contained. When examined from a student's perspective, the CGSOC looks very different. One consequence of focusing on integrating the curriculum vertically makes horizontal integration more problematic. On the same day, students may attend a leadership lesson on "Battle Command and Decision Making" followed by a history lesson on "The Soviet-German Conflict." While each of these lessons relates logically back to the curriculum established by the various departments, they do not necessarily relate to each other. What is lost on the student is a sense of context. Instead of contributing to the student's understanding of the material, curriculum organization often detracts from such an understanding. Such a problem is not isolated to the CGSS. Many academic institutions are currently reorganizing their curriculums to better facilitate student understanding. One method that has been adopted by liberal arts undergraduate institutions, business schools, and medical schools is the thematic-based curriculum. Thematic-based curriculums organize program material around central themes that academic departments interpret and adapt to their individual courses and lessons. Such an approach imparts on the student the sense of context that is so important to facilitate understanding. This monograph identifies how such an approach can be applied to the CGSOC to better integrate its curriculum horizontally.

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Introduction

The President carefully pondered the situation before him. He knew the mission he was about to order was dangerous, arduous, perhaps even impossible. It was certainly something that no one had done before. While it was not a mission of war, the President—as so many would do after him—turned to the services of the U.S. Army, appointing a youthful, but capable, captain to lead the Corps of Discovery. In 1804, President Thomas Jefferson's desire to explore the newly-acquired Louisiana Purchase consumed him. The annexation doubled the size of the young United States, and there was little knowledge of what it contained. Complicating matters, the young officer he selected to lead the mission, Captain Meriwether Lewis, was barely qualified for the task. While certainly talented, Lewis was not trained in the sciences of cartography, botany, astronomy, nature, and navigation that would be required to lead the expedition. To Lewis this meant one thing, "hard intensive study in a variety of disciplines under a severe time pressure."[1]

Throughout history, U.S. Army officers have consistently found themselves in situations where "hard intensive study" was a requirement for mission success. Rarely have the ideal formations, equipment, resources, and professional education systems aligned perfectly with the missions the Army has been tasked to accomplish. Throughout its history, the Army adapted to a variety of environments with impacts ranging from political realities to technological innovations. However, complicating matters today is the multifaceted nature of warfare in the 21st Century. The Army recognizes that it operates across a "full spectrum of operations" including not only traditional offensive and defensive operations but also stability and reconstruction operations.[2] Critical to performing across the range of full spectrum operations is understanding the

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[1]Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 84.

[2]United States Army, *Field Manual 1-0: The Army* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2005), 3-6.

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operational environment, a "composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander."[3]

The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan caused the military to identify many shortcomings in the way it prepares and executes war. One such shortcoming involved the Army education system's ability to adequately prepare officers to properly evaluate the operational environment. Such a deficiency is highlighted by General David Petraeus's advocacy of civilian graduate school experiences for mid-career officers. Recalling his time as a division commander in Mosul, Iraq, Petraeus relied on his civilian graduate school experiences to "provide real skills, knowledge, and expertise" to help him solve the problems he confronted.[4] Simply put, the military education alone had not provided him the tools he needed to reach an understanding of his operational environment.

To correct this shortcoming, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began making changes to doctrine. Examining systems theory, the United States Joint Forces Command believed that the operational environment was best evaluated through an "understanding of interrelated systems."[5] As such, doctrine writers identified six key systems: political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure (PMESII) that staffs should consider to better understand their surroundings. Formalized in 2006 with the publication of a revised Joint Publication 3-0 that incorporated PMESII as operational variables, the Joint Staff believed doctrine would now facilitate an understanding of "the continuous and complex interaction of friendly, adversary, and neutral systems."[6] The Army responded with its own 2008 revision of Field Manual 3-0 which included

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[3] United States Army, *Field Manual 3-0 Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2008), 1-1.

[4] David Petraeus, "Beyond the Cloister," *The American Interest,* July-August (2007). http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=290 (accessed February 4, 2011).

[5] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1: Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, The Joint Cheifs of Staff, 2007), II-23.

[6] Ibid.

PMESII and added physical environment and time as additional variables (PMESII-PT).[7] While the Army may have successfully identified the problem presented in a staff's inability to understand the operational environment, the adoption of the operational variables as a solution created an educational gap between what staffs are being asked to consider and what they are educated to do.

The importance to understanding the operational environment cannot be understated. Before planning a military operation, officers must understand the environment within which they are operating and how military operations will change that environment. During the Cold War, the Army focused doctrine on the Warsaw Pact. The Army understood that should war break out, victory would be achieved by defeating the enemy's army. As such, staffs developed plans with this one goal in mind. However, in the post-Cold War world, the operational environment changed significantly.

Throughout the 1990s, operations such as Bosnia and Kosovo foreshadowed future wars that would be fought "amongst the people."[8] Still, the Army educated and trained its officers to prepare for a high intensity and military-centric fight. The Army recognized this problem in its 2003 report by the Army Training and Leader Development Panel (ATLDP) which stated, "the operational environment has changed faster than the Army has adapted its training and leader development programs."[9] This acknowledgement did inspire some changes to formal training and education. As Colonel Thomas S. Hollis reported in his 2008 monograph, the ATLDP report inspired changes to the Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC) that "increased the

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[7]FM 3-0, 1-5.

[8]United States Army, *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2006), forward.

[9]Army Training and Leader Development Panel "Report to the Army," Army Training and Leader Development, http://www.army.mil/features/ATLD/report.pdf, OS-6 (accessed November 15, 2010). The Army Training and Leader Development Panel was established by Chief of Staff of the Army General Eric K. Shinseki and examined leader development in the enlisted, officer, and warrant officer ranks in phases from 2001 to 2003. While chartered by the Chief of Staff, the proponent of the ATLDP was the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center.

scope of the curriculum to ensure relevancy and the number of officers required to attend."[10] As

of 2005, all majors were required to attend some form of Intermediate Level Education (ILE).

However, the 2009 Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS) indicated problems relating to

educating officers about the operational environment remain.

> Such an environment demands that we develop leaders who **understand** the context of
> the factors influencing the military situation, **act** within that understanding, continually
> **assess and adapt** those actions based on the interactions and circumstances of the enemy
> and environment, **consolidate** tactical and operational opportunities into strategic aims,
> and be able to effectively **transition** from one form of operations to another. We seek to
> develop leaders who will thrive in this environment.[11]

Implementing this strategy in the CGSOC will require careful consideration of the curriculum to

ensure such and understanding can be achieved.

Traditionally, the Army has been very successful in understanding certain aspects of the

operational environment. An understanding of the military system, for example, is almost always

clearly articulated and communicated throughout the force. Likewise, the Army has done well at

evaluating the physical environment, time, and infrastructure as it relates to military operations.

However, since these operational variables are now codified in doctrine, it remains unclear how

officers, trained in the art and science of warfighting, are educated to evaluate such seemingly

foreign concepts as social systems, economic systems, politics, and infrastructure as they relate to

the needs of a civilian population. Thus, the question this monograph seeks to answer is, what

changes, if any, are necessary in the Army's Intermediate Level Education (ILE) system to better

prepare officers to evaluate the operational environment?

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[10]Thomas S. Hollis, "ILE a Casualty of War" (AOASF Monograph, School of Advanced Military
Studies, 2008), 13.

[11]United States Army, "Army Leader Development Strategy," U.S. Army,
http://cgsc.edu/ALDS/ArmyLdrDevStrategy_20091125.pdf (accessed November 15, 2010), 3. [emphasis
original]. Building on the work done by the ATLDP, the ALDS incorporates the Army's experiences
learned from nearly a decade of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The ALDS is also the first leader
development document informed by the Army Capstone Concept. Approved by the Chief of Staff of the
Army General George Casey in December 2009, the proponent for the ALDS was the U.S. Army
Combined Arms Center.

With a mere two hours devoted to the subject, currently ILE does not sufficiently lead students to an understanding of the operational environment.[12] While there are a variety of ways officers may satisfy their ILE requirements, this monograph will focus exclusively on the Army's resident Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas where most active-component officers attend. The monograph will analyze curriculum development as a matter of theory and how lessons learned from civilian institutions can improve the CGSOC. As Arthur Chickering, David Halliburton, William Bergquist, and Jack Lindquist's *Developing The College Curriculum* demonstrated, the civilian academic community provides curriculum models that can be applied in the Officer Education System. Specifically, William Bergquist's model of a Thematic-Based Curriculum is particularly useful.[13] When assessed against the blocks of instruction in the CGSOC, the thematic-based approach can provide insights into how students can achieve an understanding of the operational environment through a curriculum that is better integrated.

While Bergquist wrote almost exclusively of the undergraduate setting, his models and contributions can apply to the graduate-level CGSOC. Undergraduate institutions are generally centered around a core curriculum that seeks to impose a common framework on students throughout their four years of study. As a one-year course, the CGSOC is essentially a core curriculum of classes that seeks to impart a common set of competencies on its graduates before they return to the field Army. Additionally, thematic-based curriculums are gaining popularity in professional schools as well. Recently, several top-tier business and medical schools have

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[12]United States Army Command and General Staff School, "C100 Theme Advance Sheet," CGSC Blackboard, https://courses.leavenworth.army.mil/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=_2951_1 (accessed November 3, 2010). The lesson addressing the operational environment is a part of the "stage setter" portion of the CGSOC core curriculum.

[13]William Bergquist. "Diversity in the College Curriculum," in *Developing the College Curriculum: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators*, by Arthur W. Chickering, David Halliburton, William H. Bergquist and Jack Lindquist (Washington, DC: Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges, 1977), 90.

scrapped their traditional curriculums in favor of a thematic-based approach. In this sense, Berguist's thematic-based curriculum is an appropriate model to use for assessing the CGSOC.

Frederick Rudolph wrote that curriculum is about more than simply what students learn. Instead, it must be understood by "paying attention to all the elements that give it life—students, knowledge, teachers, and the courses where everything either falls together or falls apart."[14] As such, this monograph is not intended to be a critique of the CGSOC or its purpose. In fact, CGSOC's contribution to the Army over its 130 year history is well-noted and rightfully admired. Rather, this monograph is designed to provide an idea on how the course can better prepare officers to understand their operational environment as the Army is increasingly demanding them to do. In the spirit of Rudolph's definition of what comprises a curriculum, it is written from the student's perspective.

This monograph will demonstrate how an understanding of the operational environment is an expectation of field grade officers and how a thematic-based curriculum at CGSOC may develop such an understanding. This will first be done through an examination of the Army Leader Development System (ALDS) report that was published in 2009. Next, the Army Learning Concept for 2015 is explored which builds on the ALDS and envisions a "learner-centric learning environment" where students study subjects in context of the environment.[15] Subsequently, the thematic-based curriculum will be explored as a matter of theory and illustrate how through grouping lessons thematically, students are better able to reach an understanding by considering the context of the knowledge learned. Finally such a model will be applied to the CGSOC. Critical to this analysis is the matter of curriculum integration. While integrating academic departments and lessons to the overall purpose of the Command and General Staff

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[14]Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977), 2.

[15]United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, *TRADOC Pam 525-8-2: The U.S. Army Learning Concept for 2015* (Fort Monroe, VA: United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2011), 23.

School (CGSS) is important, it is not sufficient for a student to understand what they are learning in context. To achieve such an understanding, the curriculum must be integrated between the academic departments as well. The diverse, dynamic, and complex operational environment requires careful consideration and analysis. The Army is correct in identifying many of the systems that comprise its essence, but, in the spirit of Meriwether Lewis, hard and intense study are required to ensure staffs are adequately prepared to help their commanders visualize their surroundings and the problems within them.

Literature Review

The Army's need to improve its professional education system has been evident since General George Washington's insistence that the young United States create a professional military academy to provide the country with an educated officer corps.[16] Since that time, there seems to be no shortage of opinion on how to make this system better. Ideas come from virtually everywhere. From political pundits to retired officers to academics, nearly every segment of society that touches the military has ideas on how to produce better "soldier-scholars." Additionally, perhaps no aspect of military education has been under as much scrutiny as the officer education system. In recent years, some argue that the military has been too distracted by the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to focus on the academic needs of officers. Conversely, others contend that due to these same wars, the military is more educated now than it has been in decades. However, nearly all fail to recognize that shortcomings in the officer education system in general, and the mid-career Command and General Staff College in particular, stem from a lack of coherent organization and integrated curriculum.

Retired U.S. Army Major General Robert Scales is one of the most outspoken retired officers on military education. Scales argued that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused the military to "circle X its officer seed corn."[17] His concern was that officers are substituting educational opportunities for operational assignments. While there is evidence that some officers turned down graduate school and Senior Service College opportunities, it is also true that the Army decided in 2005 to begin sending all majors to some form of Intermediate Level Education.[18] While the merits of that decision are still debated, after an initial lull, record

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[16]Stephen Ambrose. *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point.* Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, 14.

[17]Robert Scales, "Too Busy to Learn," *Proceedings* 136, no. 2 (February 2010): 31. Circle X is a reference to the common practice in the operational Army of deferring maintenance of minor faults on military equipment in order to keep the unit physically capable of performing its mission.

[18]Ibid.

attendance numbers at the CGSOC seem to indicate that the Army may not be too busy to learn. However, Scales makes another point that is illustrative of a larger problem.

Recognizing the strain an expanded CGSOC has placed on the staffing requirements of the Command and General Staff College, the Army has civilianized nearly its entire faculty. Scales saw this as "most disturbing."[19] Scales recognized that experienced active-duty officers are essential for students to receive a relevant and quality education. Furthermore, Scales argued that military schools serve the instructors as well as the students. While students graduate with knowledge, "instructors return to the force with the wisdom accumulated from long-term immersion in a subject and an amplified appreciation of the art and science of war that comes from time to reflect, teach, research, and think."[20] The instructor's professional development notwithstanding, military faculty members are also not distracted by professional concerns such as contract negotiations, tenure, or pressure to publish. As such, military instructors are arguably in a better position to focus their attention on the student and, consequently, the needs of the Army.

Another retired officer, Lieutenant General James Dubik, also wrote extensively on professional officer education and what it means for the future of the Army. In *Preparing for Your Future and That of the U.S. Army*, Dubik stressed the importance of continuing one's education and added the principle of adaptability. While many seek to find an optimal, and terminal, solution to military education woes, Dubik rightly saw the process as dynamic. He argued that few things in the world are fixed, and as such, military officers must be deft at "adapting that which must change and conserving that which remains useful."[21] While not

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[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., 32.

[21]James Dubik, "Preparing for Your Future and that of the U.S. Army," Foreign Policy. http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/01/11/jim_dubik_on_how_to_be_an_officer_nowadays (accessed November 15, 2010).

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specifically addressing the CGSOC, Dubik's points on the value of adaptability inspire the questions as to how does one train to be adaptable, and how is an institution created that itself is adaptable to the changing needs of the Army?

Others, such as James Pierce, saw the problem as more cultural than academic. Pierce, a retired Army colonel and current Director of Publications at the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute, argued that there exists a "lack of congruence between the U.S. Army professional culture and the professional development programs of the Army's senior level leaders."[22] Conducted at the War College, Pierce's study revealed that senior Army leaders recognized the need for a professional culture "characterized by flexibility, discretion, participation, human resource development, innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and long-term commitment to professional growth," but he believed officers operated in one whose culture is "characterized by an overarching desire for stability and control, formal rules and policies, coordination and efficiency, goal and results oriented, and hard-driving competitiveness."[23] While such a study is perhaps not surprising, it is revealing of an inconsistency between what the Army's stated goals are in the ALDS and what perceptions exist in the force. Encouragingly, Pierce's study illustrates how senior leaders have embraced the ideas contained in the ALDS, however the organizational and institutional change has not matched the enthusiasm for reform.

Casey Wardynski, David Lyle, and Michael Colarusso argued in *Towards a U.S. Army Officer Strategy for Success: Employing Talent* that the current methods of assigning officers are not talent-based. Instead, they argue, "the Army unduly prioritizes 'fairness' when making assignments, has a narrowly defined pathway to senior leadership ranks, cannot see the talent it

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[22]James Pierce, *"Is the Organizational Culture of the U.S. Army Congruent with the Professional Development of its Senior Level Officer Corps?,"* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2010), xiv.

[23]Ibid.

possesses, and suffers from severe principal-agent problems."[24] While the authors' argument centers around ensuring the right officer, with the right attributes, is assigned to the right job, the question of talent is certainly applicable to the CGSOC. Since 2005, attendance at CGSOC is non-discriminatory. Every officer in the basic branches will attend. Furthermore, the CGSS assigns these officers to small 16-member seminars where the majority of instruction is accomplished (Figure 1). These seminars are created with diversity as a primary goal without consideration of an officer's academic or military talents or experiences. While there are benefits to grouping an infantry officer with a quartermaster, those benefits are erased if the talent gap between the two is too wide to bridge. Likewise, there are no meaningful talent evaluation mechanisms. While students may compete for the top graduate and a variety of other awards, there is no class ranking system or commandant's list. Students are not encouraged to display their talents.

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[24]Casey Wardynski, David S. Lyle, and Michael J. Colarusso. *Towards a U.S. Army Officer Corps Strategy for Success: Employing Talent.* Monograph, Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army Strategic Studies Institute, 2010, vii. Principle-agent problem refers to the occasion when a superior and subordinate's interests are not aligned. This may be the result of incomplete information between principle and agent or may be when the principle directs the agent to a position that his interests do not support. Wardynski and Colarusso, assert that the Army assignment system is more focused on placing an officer in a position regardless of his or her personal or academic interests or talent.
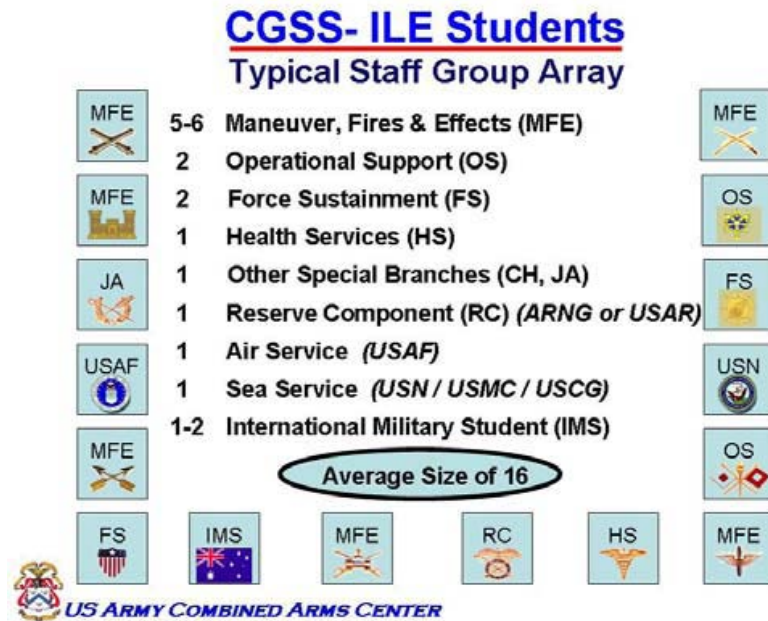
Figure 1. Typical Composition of CGSOC Staff Group[25]

In regards to the CGSOC curriculum itself, authors have offered other ideas for improvement. In his 1999 Master of Military Arts and Sciences thesis, U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Michael Carney argues for a curriculum that is more joint rather than service focused. Recognizing that field grade officers are the ones who "plan and direct execution" of Joint Task Force operations, the "entire curriculum should be designed to produce officers ready to serve on Joint Task Forces as commanders, planners, and other staff officers."[26] While such a revision would likely improve inter-service cooperation, any additional teamwork realized cannot come at the expense of an officer's understanding of the operational environment.

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[25]U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, "Preparing Leaders for the Future: Command and General Staff College Command Brief," Fort Leavenworth, KS, 5 November 2007, Slide 17. As reported in "Full Spectrum Operations: An Analysis of Course Content at the Command and General Staff College" (SAMS Monograph by MAJ Frank L. Turner, 2008), 29.

[26]Michael K. Carney, "Joint Professional Military Education 1999: Where to Now?" (MMAS Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1999), 70.

From an educational theory perspective, Major Matthew McKinley presented in his 2005 SAMS monograph five principles that curriculum developers should incorporate to encourage students to become critical thinkers and lifelong learners. In his analysis, the CGSOC incorporated three of the five principles, while two, a focus on opportunities for self-direction and staff training on self-directed learning and critical thinking, were either not or partially implemented.[27] According to McKinley, the Army's recent focus on developing critical thinkers in its officer corps seems to be moving in the right direction. However, one must also think critically about the content that CGSOC graduates are expected to learn during the course. Thinking critically is an important skill, but it must be combined with a proper education in the appropriate content areas the Army requires CGSOC graduates to possess.

Major Frank Turner II evaluated the CGSOC curriculum in his 2008 monograph in terms of operational and non-operational subject areas. Turner's findings reveal that while 69% of the core curriculum can be considered as "non-operational" education, the common core "included extensive instruction on the Military Decision Making Process and Joint Operations Planning Process."[28] There was virtually no instruction on the operational environment or the operational variables despite the recent revision to FM 3-0. This deficiency continues today.

Finally, in *The Change Agent* Lee Grossman warns that organizational change is a deliberate and thoughtful endeavor and should not be taken for the sake of change itself. Being agile and adaptive is not an excuse to be reckless when advocating change within an organization. Rapid or too much change, Grossman argued, "is neither natural nor good for people or organizations."[29] Thus, balance is required. Any change to the CGSOC cannot be made without

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[27]Matthew R. McKinley, "An Assessment of the Army Officer Education System from an Adult Learning Perspective" (AMSP Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2005), 33.

[28]Frank Turner. "Full Spectrum Operations: An Analysis of Course Content an the Command and General Staff College"(AMSP Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2008), 37.

[29]Lee Grossman, *The Change Agent* (New York: AMACOM Press, 1974), 4.

regard to the value it brings to the Army as a whole. Nevertheless, in order to bring the purpose of the school in line with the needs of the Army, some change may be necessary. While many ideas exist on how to improve the CGSOC, few recognize the need to reform the curricular structure of the school itself. Applying a thematic-based curriculum can help accomplish the necessary change while preserving the curriculum's long-term agility.

Army Guidance on Leader Development

Before examining the CGSOC, it is important to know the context by which the course and its parent institution, the Command and General Staff College, fit into the Army's vision for leader development. Army officers are first educated at their commissioning source. The United States Military Academy (USMA), Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and Officer Candidate School (OCS) collectively produce virtually all second lieutenants commissioned in the Army each year. Collectively, these commissioning sources are known as the Basic Officer Leadership Course-A (BOLC-A). After commissioning, officers attend branch-specific training known as BOLC-B. [30] Upon promotion to Captain, officers attend the Captain's Career Course which prepares them to serve as company-level commanders. At mid-career, the focus of this monograph, majors attend Intermediate Level Education, normally at the Command and General Staff College. Formal military education culminates at the senior lieutenant-colonel or colonel level with attendance at a Senior Service College (SSC).

While military leadership and leader development have been important aspects of the U.S. Army for over 200 years, a comprehensive strategy for developing leaders is relatively new. A byproduct of the Army Capstone Program, the Army Leader Development Strategy, published in November 2009, provided the latest holistic approach to how the Army grows its leaders.[31] Building on the ATLDP that came before it, the ALDS recognized that the Army is currently "out of balance" in preparing leaders to operate in complex full-spectrum operations and provided a plan to restore that balance.[32] The ALDS maintained the Army's long-held commitment to its

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[30]United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, *TRADOC Regulation 350-36: Basic Officer Leadership Course Training Policies and Administratio.* (Fort Monroe, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2010), 6.

[31]United States Army, "2010 Army Posture Statement," Headquarters Department of the Army, https://secureweb2.hqda.pentagon.mil/vdas_armyposturestatement/2010/information_papers/Army_Leader_Development_Strategy_for_a_21st_Century_Army_%28ALDS%29.asp (accessed November 20, 2010).

[32]ALDS, 2.

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leader development framework consisting of three major pillars: training, education, and experience (Figure 2). However, the ALDS suggested that it is the content and approach that must be adjusted. A key element to accomplishing this goal is to ensure Army leaders are capable of understanding the "complexities of the future operational environment" and recognizing that doing so requires "continual adaptation." As such, it can be said that, the Army must improve in its efforts to train leaders in such attributes.
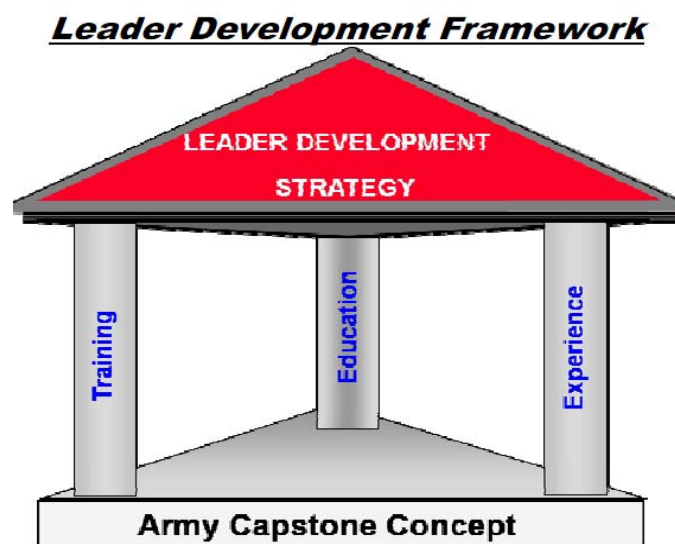

Figure 2. The Army's Leader Development Framework[33]

To meet these challenges, the ALDS first identified the need to understand the operational environment and how to function within it. Specifically, the Army requires "leaders who are confident, versatile, adaptive, and innovative."[34] The ALDS recognized the need for

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[33]Ibid., 7. While the focus of this monograph centers on an officer's education, it should not be interpreted to suggest that education supersedes the training and experience from the three-pillared construct detailed in the ALDS.

[34]Ibid., 3.

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three "paradigm shifts" that the Army must undertake in order to implement the new strategy.[35] The first of these is due to "the effect of increasing complexity and time."[36] Traditionally, leaders were trained to mass lethal effects against a well-defined enemy. In training, "raising the bar" often meant compressing the timeline a leader had to operate.[37] However, the ALDS stated that while this was effective in developing leaders at solving "well-defined problems…against a single threat" the opposite method is required to develop leaders to solve the modern day "ill-defined problems" against a "variety of threats."[38]

Secondly, the ALDS stated that current and future leaders will need to be prepared for the increased responsibility associated with the effect of decentralization. Recognizing that future conflict is likely to be persistent and requiring a "greater decentralization of capability and decision-making authority."[39] While the Army has decentralized organizationally by adopting a modular structure, the inclusion of this paradigm shift into the ALDS suggested that Army as a whole has been reluctant to embrace such a concept. Correcting this, according to the ALDS, will require matching "tactical agility with institutional agility."[40] Instilling such institutional agility is a necessary component to implementing the ALDS. However, doing so will require great commitment and patience. As Thomas Kuhn observed, "novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation."[41]

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[35]Ibid.

[36] Ibid.,4.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 5.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* 3rd Edition. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, 64.

The third paragraph shift the ALDS proposed was "the need to frame ill-structured problems."[42] This is necessary since future conflicts are likely to present ill-defined and multifaceted problems. Understanding the problem and its complexities is a critical step Army leaders must take before undertaking efforts to solve them. Tools to accomplish this are slowly making their way into the operational Army. The introduction of the design methodology into Field Manual 5-0 is an example of such a move aimed at change. As General Martin Dempsey stated in the foreword to FM 5-0, the introduction of design into Army doctrine highlights "the importance of understanding complex problems more fully before [solving] them through traditional planning processes."[43] As a capstone document, the ALDS's embrace of problem framing and the design methodology in leader development is significant. In fact, the ALDS states that "design will be a cornerstone of our leader development strategy for both military and civilian leaders."[44] Integrating design into the CGSOC should be seamless as the Army's proponent is the CGSC's own School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). Yet despite the ALDS's vision for the aspects of leader development to change, one still must consider how such changes are to be applied to mid-level officers taught at the CGSOC before one can consider how CGSOC itself should adapt.

The ALDS kept in place the Army's longstanding leader development framework consisting of three basic pillars: training, education, and experience. Each pillar is an important piece of a leader's development which is envisioned to be "a career-long process."[45] No pillar should be considered sufficient to grow the leaders the Army needs. As Scales states, the personnel system's bias towards experience has "caused our learning system to atrophy and

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[42]ALDS, 6.

[43]United States Army, *Field Manual 5-0: The Operations Process,* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2010), forward. Design continues to work its way into Army doctrine with Change 1 to FM 3-0 pending release in 2011.

[44]ALDS, 6.

[45]Ibid.

become obsolescent."[46] The Army has undertaken initiatives to reverse such trends in recent years. One such initiative is the "universal ILE" model where all mid-level officers are trained to the same military education level. While the intention may be good, mandatory attendance at an intermediate level education facility does not guarantee the quality of the education or that the experience meets the ALDS vision for what a mid-level leader should be.

Additionally, while making ILE a requirement for all majors, at the same time, a developmental opportunity was lost when the Army eliminated the Combined Armed Services Staff School (CAS3). CAS3 was a required six week course for all captains intended to prepare them to serve on battalion and brigade-level staffs. Nevertheless, among the requirements the ALDS specifies for mid-level leaders are that they "demonstrate competence in ambiguous and complex situations...[that they are] masters of military science…[and that] individual development begins to shift from increased depth of knowledge to increased breadth of perspective."[47] One can now ask how the CGSOC contributes to this vision.

CGSOC and the ALDS

The ALDS demands, as Captain Lewis demonstrated 200 years ago, that Army officers be agile and adaptable in their ability to solve ill-structured problems and overcome a variety of challenges. Throughout its history, the CGSOC has existed to fill an intellectual deficit in the officer ranks. Created in 1881 as the School for Application for Infantry and Cavalry, the Army saw the need for such a school due to the "poor state of professional training in the officer corps."[48] Realizing that many of its officers came from diverse backgrounds with no real foundation of military training, the new school under the leadership of Colonel Elwell Otis

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[46]Scales, 31.

[47]ALDS, 13.

[48]Jonathan M. House. "The Fort and the New School." *A Brief History of Fort Leavenworth.* Edited by John W. Partin. 1983. http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/resources/ftlvn/briefhist/briefhist.asp#school (accessed November 4, 2010).

assessed the incoming classes and determined their academic needs. While the school's purpose was to train officers for war, Otis recognized that officers required a broad educational experience in addition to drill and tactics.

To satisfy this need, officers were evaluated in, "English grammar, geography, descriptive and physical, arithmetic, algebra, plane geometry, general history, United States history, composition, and written correspondence." [49] Otis then designed a curriculum to address their shortcomings. While this subject matter was likely chosen because officers of the time often received no formal post-secondary education, it still speaks to the value of a broad-based curriculum. Otis ensured the students schedule was demanding as "drills, recitations, ceremonies and hours for study follow each other in rapid succession throughout the day."[50] High expectations set by instructors caused the students to respond in kind with Otis reporting that students "have cheerfully taken up their labors, apparently impressed with the belief that the two years' course which they have undertaken is to be devoted to study and work."[51] Such a work ethic seems to have changed over the years. According to a recent CGSC commandant, expectations set for today's officers include learning only as a component of the CGSOC assignment. While CGSOC provides a "great educational experience," says Lieutenant General William Caldwell, "it also needs to be a chance for our officers to take a break."[52] While no one underestimates the importance of balance in life, it must not come at the expense of providing quality officers to the Army.

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[49]Elwell Stephen Otis, "Fort Leavenworth Annual Report 1883," Combined Arms Research Library. http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/download/reports/rep1883.pdf (accessed November 3, 2010).

[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid.

[52]Command and General Staff Foundation, "Q&A with the CGSC Commandant, Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV," *Command and General Staff Foundation News*, Winter 2008, 9. LTG Caldwell was the commandant of the CGSC from 2007-2009 and currently serves as the Commanding General of the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan.

Given that most officers attend CGSOC between their eleventh and twelfth years of service and that most will continue in the army until retirement some eight years later, the significance of the program cannot be understated. For many officers, the CGSOC will be the terminal formal military educational experience of their careers. As prescribed by the ALDS, the CGSOC must demonstrate institutional agility to ensure that modern graduates have the tools they need to be effective leaders for the future. The current problem is that the CGSOC does not fully support the ALDS. As Scales observed, "atrophy has gripped the school house, and what was once the shining light of progressivism has become an intellectual backwater."[53] While clearly a necessary component to leader development, the focus and organization of the CGSOC does not support the development of mid-level leaders who "demonstrate competence in ambiguous and complex situations."[54] To achieve the institutional agility that the ALDS requires, the CGSOC must review its approach to curriculum structure. In this capacity, the CGSOC can learn lessons from installing a thematic-based curriculum that directly supports the ALDS as well as apply lessons learned from other professional education institutions, such as medical and business schools. Doing so would provide more of a context to the content officers are exposed to and better facilitate understanding. Fortunately, such changes can be done with little alteration to the current structure of the school. In fact, in many ways, the Army has embraced attributes of thematic-based curricula with the Army Learning Concept.

The Army Learning Concept for 2015

The ALDS is not the only significant document that guides officer education. Recognizing that the ALDS and the Army Capstone Concept demanded the Army change the way soldiers were educated, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC)

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[53]Scales, 32.

[54]ALDS, 13.

published the Army Learning Concept for 2015 (ALC) on 20 January 2011. The ALC's purpose is not to alter what soldier's learn, but the manner in how they learn it. It proposes a comprehensive learning model that is designed to "develop adaptive, thinking soldiers and leaders capable of meeting the challenges of operational adaptability in an era of persistent conflict."[55] Calling the existing model "inadequate" the ALC envisions a completely new educational model where soldiers learn from not only in classroom settings, but from self-study, technology, and peers as well.[56] Figure 3 depicts some of the characteristics the new ALC model will contain.
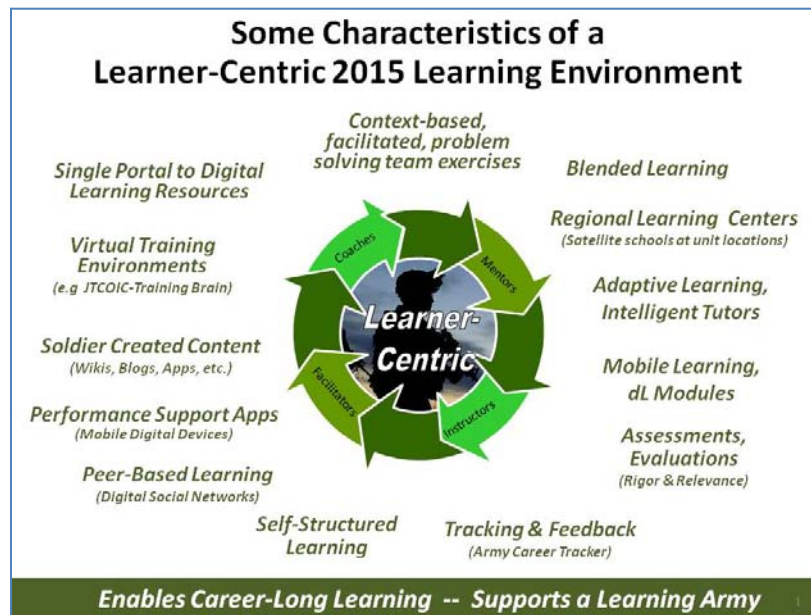

Figure 3. Attributes of the Army Learning Concept for 2015[57]

Despite the recent publication of the ALC, much its ideas are not new. Self-study, the use of technology, and peer-learning have been embraced by the Army for some time. The Army has long encouraged soldiers to study on their own using internet based resources such as the Rosetta Stone and other non-internet based correspondence courses. Additionally, Army leaders publish

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[55]ALC, 5.

[56]Ibid., 6.

[57] Ibid., 19.

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recommended reading lists for soldiers at all levels. Similarly, peer leadership is often the basis

for training at commissioning sources and Ranger School. However, bringing such ideas into the

formal classroom environment does set a precedent. By referring to faculty at military schools as

"facilitators" rather than "instructors," the ALC makes clear that students are expected to be equal

partners and equally responsible for their learning.[58] Just as significant is the ALC's insistence on

the student's ability to "understand the relevance and context of what they learn."[59] Such an

emphasis implies that one's adaptability and understanding of the operational environment cannot

be learned when curriculum courses are isolated from each other. Simply put the context matters.

Thematic-based curricula can better provide such a context.

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[58]Ibid., 9.

[59]Ibid.

Thematic-Based Curriculum

The idea of a curriculum organized along broad themes has been around for some time. In 1977, Professor Bergquist wrote that a thematic-based curricula assigns "a specific theme to its mission as an educational institution."[60] Such a theme is then woven throughout the entire curriculum where faculty relates specifics of their disciplines to the theme as a whole. In order for such an approach to be effective, an "integrated approach to knowledge" is required linking academic departments and lessons not only to the institution but to each other as well.[61] However, Bergquist acknowledged that adopting such a curricula often poses a challenge for colleges who often find it "impossible to agree on a mission of the institution."[62] Despite the associated challenges, the need for such an integrated approach to education is not new.

As Frederick Rudolph recalled, "beginning in 1913 at Harvard, the division of history, government, and economics adopted the practice of examining seniors in general or comprehensive examinations that covered material considered appropriate for the student's area of concentration but not necessarily presented in his courses."[63] Such a "comprehensive examination," Rudolph continued was "an instrument for bringing coherence and design and some semblance of unity to the academic course."[64] While a comprehensive examination is likely not the most effective way to integrate a diverse curriculum, integration itself has long been recognized as necessary in order for learners to achieve understanding. Thematic curricula seek to make integration a more natural experience. Such curricula have been developed in civilian institutions with great success with a much more heterogeneous student body.

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[60]Bergquist, 90.

[61]Arthur W. Chickering, David Halliburton, William H. Bergquist, and Jack Lindquist, *Developing the College Curriculum: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators* (Washington, DC: Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges, 1977), 183.

[62]Bergquist, 91.

[63]Rudolph, 235.

[64]Ibid., 236.

Application of a thematic-based curriculum is not a new concept. Its use is becoming more popular in educational institutions that produce professional-minded graduates at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Liberal arts, business, and medical schools provide examples of thematic-based curricula in practice. One such institution is the College of the Atlantic located in Bar Harbor, Maine. Upon its inception in the 1970s, the College of the Atlantic concerned itself with the study of human ecology.[65] From this specific problem area, it developed a diverse curriculum that led to courses on broad subject areas. Courses on a particular form of marine life or river system, for example, would explore "the social, political and economic aspects of the problem, as well as more general cultural and historical dimensions."[66] Such a course would be done holistically with multiple faculty members working in concert relating their specific content areas to ensure the student's understanding.

This approach was somewhat radical for its time. Rudolph stated that "by 1976, concentration was in charge of the curriculum" with "increased specialization…at the expense of general education."[67] "Interdepartmental majors," he continued, "led troubled careers."[68] Nevertheless, much of the College of the Atlantic's initial thematic-based approach survives to this day with its academic philosophy stressing creativity, critical thinking, integrative thinking, and an interdisciplinary approach to education.[69] Many of the aspects the College of the Atlantic student explores are very similar to the U.S. military's approach to the operational environment. Understanding how different systems interact with each other and how they affect the larger problem are just as important for the modern military officer.

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[65]Bergquist, 90.

[66]Ibid., 91.

[67]Rudolph, 248.

[68]Ibid., 249.

[69]College of the Atlantic. "Academic Philosophy," College of the Atlantic, http://www.coa.edu/academic-philosophy.htm (accessed November 15, 2010).

The benefits of a thematic based curriculum are not lost on graduate-level professional schools either. In responding to "today's complex business world," the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management recently adopted a thematic approach to its Master of Business Administration curriculum.[70] Ranked by the *Financial Times* as one of the top 50 MBA programs worldwide, the Rotman MBA program's "Integrative Thinking" approach is built on the importance of "flexibility and creativity."[71] In a 2005 *Businessweek* interview, Dean Roger Martin described the school's reasoning for adopting a thematic-based curriculum in terms that will sound familiar to modern military officers. "Companies were hiring us for messy problems that didn't fit into one discipline or another," Martin said. "They wanted people who could design solutions to complicated business problems."[72] The Army requires field grade officers who are equally capable of solving such problems.

Rotman recognizes that traditional business education divides business into functional areas such as marketing, finance, and organizational behavior. However, such an educational model discourages the realities of the business world. Rotman believes that since "business problems rarely lie within the boundaries of individual functional areas, but rather, spread messily across the functions," the educational model must change.[73] Believing that such problems can be best addressed through "numerous academic disciplines" Rotman takes its Integrative Thinking theme and weaves it throughout its two-year program.[74] While the concept is introduced during a foundations class taken in the first year and reinforced with several other core and elective classes

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[70]Lindsey Gerdes, "Online Extra: An MBA with a Thematic Approach," Businessweek Online, http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_36/b3949099_mz056.htm (accessed February 2, 2011).

[71]Rotman Business School, "Two-Year MBA," Rotman Business School, http://www.rotman.utoronto.ca/mba/contactProg.asp (accessed February 4, 2011).

[72]Gerdes.

[73]Rotman Business School. "Definition of Integrative Thinking," Rotman Business School, http://www.rotman.utoronto.ca/integrativethinking/details.aspx?ContentID=371 (accessed February 4, 2011).

[74]Gerdes.

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the curriculum also includes a half-year "Design Practicum" that pairs business students with graduate students of Industrial Design who work cooperatively to "develop solutions to large-scale, actual innovation challenges."[75] In essence, students at Rotman are trained from the beginning to look at their environment from multiple perspectives to be more effective problem-solvers. Rotman's thematic-based curriculum allows such an understanding to emerge by combining its interdisciplinary education with a curriculum that is integrated vertically and horizontally throughout the program. With enrollment and its academic rankings on the rise, the value of such an approach to education should not go unnoticed.

Similarly, the New York University (NYU) School of Medicine recently rebuilt its curriculum using a thematic and integrated approach. Recognizing the need to treat the "whole patient" rather than just the disease, the NYU School of Medicine organized its curriculum along a "patient-centered longitudinal clinical exposure" where medical students will not only learn the science of disease through classroom instruction but also through "didactics on the integration of the physician, patient, and society."[76] The program also places students as part of an "interdisciplinary team" providing care to patients from the first year at the school.

Additionally, the School of Medicine's curriculum is organized into disease-based thematic "pillars" that "spiral through the four-year curriculum."[77] The pillars highlight a disease that all aspects of the curriculum can relate back to. Their purpose is to give focus and substance to the various academic classes students take on a semester basis and thereby link these classes

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[75]Rotman Business School, "MBA Curriculum," Rotman Business School, http://www.rotman.utoronto.ca/integrativethinking/details.aspx?ContentID=373 (accessed February 4, 2011).

[76]New York University School of Medicine. "Practice of Medicine," New York University, http://ome.med.nyu.edu/medical-curriculum/practice-medicine (accessed February 4, 2011).

[77]Steven B. Abramson and Mel Rosenfeld, "New York University School of Medicine," *American Medicine September Supplement 2010*, 2010: s382. Dr. Abramson, MD, is currently the Senior Vice President and Vice Dean for Education, Faculty and Academic Affairs at the School of Medicine, while Dr. Rosenfeld, Ph.D, serves as the Associate Dean for Curriculum.

horizontally across the curriculum or "provide a scaffold for longitudinal learning."[78] By creating

pillars, the school brings the outside environment into the classroom and better facilitates

student's understanding. Indeed, one of the goals of these pillars is to "help create real-world

relevance to what students are studying in the classroom."[79]

Fundamentally, the School of Medicine is attempting to create better doctors. In a manner

that would be familiar to Dean Martin at Rotman School of Management, Anemona Hartcollis

reported that medical school curriculums, like their business school counterparts, had gone

"virtually unchanged" since the early 20th century.[80] Like Rotman, the School of Medicine

believes that much has been learned over the past 100 years in both medicine and educational

theory and adopted a thematic-based curriculum to better integrate content throughout the four-

year medical school experience. Doing so creates a better understanding in students on treating

patients as people. Likewise, applying a thematic based curriculum to the CGSOC can lead

military students to a better understanding of an operational environment.

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[78]New York University School of Medicine, "Pillars," New York University, http://ome.med.nyu.edu/medical-curriculum/pillars (accessed February 4, 2011).

[79]Ibid.

[80]Anemona Hartocollis, "In Medical School Shift, Meeting Patients on Day 1," New York Times Online, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/03/nyregion/03medschool.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1 (accessed February 4, 2011).

Applying a Thematic Based Curriculum to CGSOC

Central to ensuring that the CGSOC graduates officers with the skills as demanded by the ALDS is that they understand the material that is presented to them. As the ALDS states, the Army must develop leaders who "***understand*** the context of the factors influencing the military situation."[81] Understanding as a concept is also of doctrinal and substantive significance. Major William Conner wrote in his 2004 monograph about the importance of "understanding first" in the contemporary operating environment.[82] Similarly, Major Daniel Hibner argued in 2008 how understanding is achieved through "systemic approaches" that "seek to acquire knowledge and provide meaning to that knowledge."[83] Clearly the idea of understanding is an important component to military education. However, it is important to first define understanding.

U.S. Army Field Manual 6-0 states that understanding is "knowledge that has been synthesized and had judgment applied to it in a specific situation to comprehend the situation's inner relationships."[84] In an educational sense, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe stated that "knowledge and skill…are necessary elements of understanding, but not sufficient in themselves." It is through "transfer," Wiggins and McTighe continued, that understanding exists. Put another way, understanding requires "the ability to thoughtfully 'do' the work with discernment, as well as the ability to self-assess, justify, and critique such 'doings.'"[85] Thus, it can be said that understanding is more than simply the acquisition of knowledge, rather it is a state that occurs when information acquired from a variety of sources is combined, analyzed and

[81]ALDS, 3. emphasis original.

[82]William D. Conner, "Understanding First in the Contemporary Operational Environment" (AMSP Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2005), 1.

[83]Hibner, Daniel H, "A Cognitive Assessment of Military Approaches to Understanding" (AMSP Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2008), 3.

[84]United States Army, *Field Manual 6-0: Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces,* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2003), B-2.

[85]Grant P. Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design,* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall Publishers, 2005), 41.

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synthesized to create a better representation of the situation than its individual parts can do alone. The fact that such understanding is critical to army leaders is not a new concept.

Throughout history, military leaders have sought a greater understanding of their operational environment and made decisions according to that understanding. For example, Martin van Creveld wrote of Napoleon's "directed telescope" that enabled him to "directly gather the information he needed."[86] Currently, modern doctrine defines the operational environment in terms of PMESII-PT. Educating officers to achieve understanding by considering such a diverse set of systems can best be accomplished if the curriculum itself supports it. This does not mean simply adding classes in economics or political science as educating for content alone is insufficient. It is through the implementation of a thematic-based integrated curriculum that understanding can emerge.

Since its conversion to an ILE-based curriculum in 2005, the CGSOC has made marked improvements in its educational methods. Based on guidance derived from the ATLDP and through the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), the Combined Arms Center developed a new curriculum whereby virtually all Army Majors would receive military education level-4 (MEL-4) "as soon as possible after selection for promotion to major."[87] The design of "universal ILE" as it became known was to provide the Army an "operational warfighting culture which prepares all field grade officers for service in division, corps, EAC, and joint staffs."[88]

Pursuant to these goals, the Command and General Staff School (CGSS)—the division of the CGSC that runs the CGSOC—identified seven attributes that graduates of the new ILE should possess:

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[86]Martin van Creveld, *Command in War,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 75.
[87]U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *"Intermediate Level Education Overview,"* http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/DAO/ile/overview.asp (accessed January 15, 2011).
[88]Ibid.

Warfighting within Full Spectrum Operations (FSO) + Today's Operational Environment

Balance – How to think and what to think

Complex problem solving across the FSO

Balanced focus on Current Ops, Future Ops, and Plans functions

Staff Principles and concepts

Know how to synchronize it all to attain effects (Principles and Concepts)

Performance oriented training and education[89]

With these newly-identified course outcomes came a new approach to the curriculum.

Describing this new approach, in 2006, deputy commandant Brigadier General Volney J. Warner and Department of Military History Director Dr. James H. Willbanks wrote of the challenges in ensuring the new curriculum, methods of instruction, and faculty remained "timely, current, and relevant."[90] As such, ensuring that students had the tools they needed to succeed in not only their next assignments, but for "the full range of military operations for the next 10 years of their careers," became a top priority.[91] To meet this challenge, Warner and Willbanks address the need for changes to content and the way that content is presented in the classroom. Curiously, they do not address how the curriculum is organized and integrated.

Volney and Willbanks placed a great deal of emphasis on the method of instruction for the new ILE. A newly-adopted educational philosophy stressed training students "how to think" versus "what to think."[92] Accordingly, the CGSS adopted both the Experiential Learning Model and Socratic Instruction in its teaching methodology. According to the Center for Adult and Experiential Learning, successful implementation of such a learning model ensures that the

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[89]Ibid.

[90]Volney J. Warner and James H. Willbanks, "Preparing Field Grade Leaders for Today and Tomorrow," *Military Review* (January/February 2006): 104.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Ibid.

learner is engaged as an adult and that the instruction "draws on the learner's experience."[93] Clearly, CGSS has succeeded in this area with the large number of combat veterans attending the course who bring volumes of additional content to the curriculum. This method is extremely helpful in expanding the student's knowledge by learning not only from instructors and readings, but from peers as well. However, much of the personal experience shared in the CGSOC is from a company-grade officer's perspective. While helpful, it does not guarantee success at the field grade level where officers are expected to "begin to understand how their formations enable the work of the multitude of civilian organizations they will encounter outside the joint and coalition formation."[94] In essence, field grade officers must be much more sensitive as to how their actions influence the greater operational environment. Here, better integration of the CGSOC curriculum can go a long way into resolving these issues.
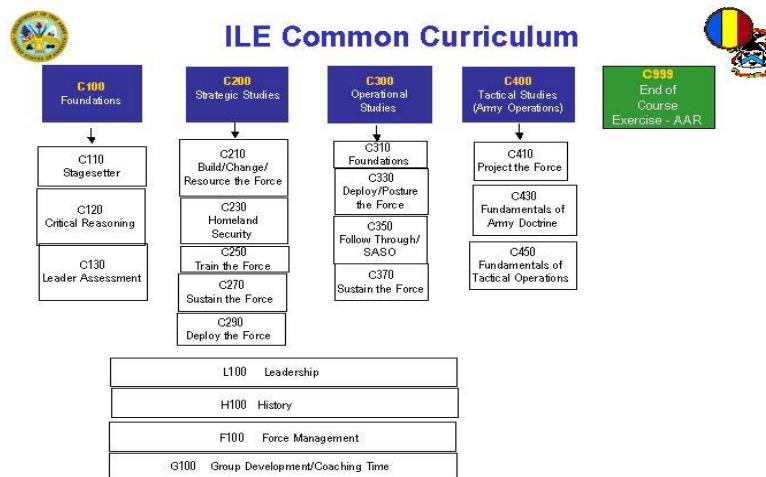
The current ILE curriculum is depicted in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4. General Structure of Current CGSOC Core Curriculum[95]

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[93]Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, *Building Blocks for Building Skills: An Inventory of Adult Learning Models and Innovations,* Report for the U.S. Department of Labor WIRED Initiative, Chicago, IL: Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2006, 79.

[94]ALDS, 13.

[95]Command and General Staff College, "Intermediate Level Education,"Command and General Staff College, https://cgsc2.leavenworth.army.mil/dsa/ile/ (accessed February 4, 2011). While this slide is

In terms of content, this curriculum is well resourced and tied to the expected outcomes of an ILE graduate. While agreement exists on the institution's overall mission and purpose, the curriculum is developed in the relative isolation of the academic departments. Currently, the curriculum is integrated *vertically* throughout the entire course; however, it is not integrated *horizontally*. For example, on any given day, an ILE student might attend a class on "Strategic Logistics" the same day there is a history lesson on "Limited War in the Eighteenth Century."[96] Although the instructors of both of these lessons teach on the same team, they may not coordinate their lessons with one another nor is there any consideration for ensuring these lessons are integrated in any way.

In another example, courses do not logically build from one day to the next either. Upon finishing an exercise, students attend classes on "The Soviet-German Conflict" followed by a leadership lesson on "Battle Command and Decision Making." The next day the same students learn about "Modular Brigade Capabilities" and "Generating Support to Forces."[97] Based on the CGSOC curriculum construct, all lessons' enabling learning objectives (ELOs) tie to established terminal learning objectives (TLOs) for the course, but there is little that ties these blocks of instruction together directly. What is lost on the student is a sense of context. By its very nature, the current construct forces the student to consider multiple aspects of the operational environment in isolation. Such tunnel-vision denies the fact that the operational environment "is not isolated or independent but interconnected by various influences."[98] By integrating the CGSS curriculum horizontally among the various academic departments, ILE students will learn with a sense of context and better apply that knowledge to obtain a better understanding of their

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from initial curiculm design in 2003, it remains the outline on the current CGSS webpage. The curriculum construct remains accurate.

[96]CGSOC AY 2011-2 combined Strawman. Lesson for 8 March 2011. The Strawman is the published schedule of the CGSOC detailing what lessons are taught on a given day.

[97] CGSOC AY 2011-2 combined Strawman. Lesson for 27 July 2011.

[98]FM 5-0, 1-1.

operational environment. As the ALC indicates, providing students with an "operationally relevant context" is a central tenant of the continuous adaptive learning model.[99]

Some might say that the ILE curriculum is already integrated horizontally through its established exercise program. Indeed, CGSS suggests as much by saying that the Trans Caucus exercise scenario is "key in integrating diverse curricula."[100] However, despite the robust nature and outstanding execution of the exercise program, it alone is not sufficient to achieve the level of understanding of the operational environment that is required of CGSOC graduates. Throughout the ten-month course, only eighteen days are devoted to exercises, and only three of these days occur during the Core Curriculum.[101] These exercises provide a great opportunity for students to evaluate the existence of an operational environment but are insufficient to establish an understanding alone. It is through a thematic-based curriculum that the latter can be achieved.

Establishing a curriculum based upon themes at the CGSOC can better integrate lessons horizontally. An examination of ELOs from various lessons in multiple departments might indicate what lessons are best taught on the same day. Days and weeks of instruction could then be organized into broader themes where the curriculum is better integrated. An instructor in a history class could then reinforce material stressed in a C200 foundations class. Such integration sets subject matter from both lessons in a larger context where understanding can be better achieved.

In looking to New York University's School of Medicine as an example, the CGSOC could organize its curriculum around themes or "pillars" that already exist in doctrine. Taking the concept of Full Spectrum Operations, for example, themes emerge such as offense, defense, and

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[99]ALC, 17.

[100]Command and General Staff College, "Intermediate Level Education,"Command and General Staff College, https://cgsc2.leavenworth.army.mil/dsa/ile/ (accessed February 4, 2011).

[101]Command and General Staff College. *Intermediate Level Education.* May 13, 2003. https://cgsc2.leavenworth.army.mil/dsa/ile/ (accessed February 4, 2011).

stability and reconstruction (Figure 4). Recognizing that all academic departments have content to contribute to each of these themes indicates that major rewrites of lessons will not be necessary. Only ordering these existing lessons to correspond with the agreed themes will be required. Students would then take classes on the same day that relate to each other in some meaningful way. Lessons about strategic logistics can be put in a historical context if instructors of each lesson tie them to the theme as a whole. Failure to do so may impart knowledge on a student, but the understanding is lost.
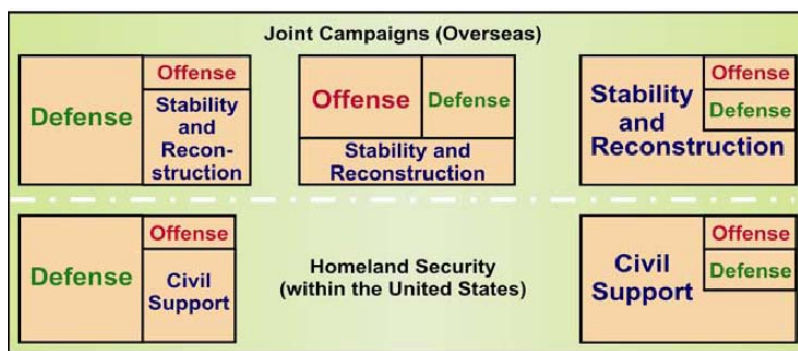

Figure 5. Full Spectrum Operations[102]

The ALC also provides some ideas as to how themes can be implemented at the CGSOC. In describing the new learning environment, the ALC echoes ideas in practice at Rotman Business School. Advocating "context-based, collaborative, and problem-centered instruction" the ALC proposes themes centered around "practical and problem solving exercises that are relevant to their work."[103] Such an approach goes beyond the existing CGSOC exercise program and permeates daily classes. Faculty become "facilitators" rather than "instructors" and encourage group discovery of solutions to problems in context of the operational environment. By looking at problems in context, students are better prepared to apply their knowledge upon graduation.

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[102]FM-1, 3-6.

[103]ALC, 19.

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Whatever the themes decided, they must be broad enough to guide students to reaching an understanding of the content they receive. New York University's School of Medicine's "pillars" are based on multi-system diseases that involve multiple organs and body functions. By relating back to these pillars throughout the medical school experience, students can put the specifics of their academic study into a real-world context. The same must be true for a thematic-based approach to work at CGSOC. Themes that are too specific risk losing the very context a thematic-approach seeks to remedy. By tying the themes to capstone doctrine or real-world problems, sufficient breadth along with contemporary relevance is assured.

Possible Impediments to Adopting a Thematic Based Curriculum

While implementing such a curriculum will not require major modifications to existing coursework, there is likely to be some resistance to change. There are two major issues that contribute to this problem: the academic bureaucracy and the conservative nature of the curriculum.

The degree of academic oversight affecting the CGSOC is perhaps the biggest impediment to change. Even after the expansion of CGSOC to include all majors, the full-time student body is relatively small. The most recent summer class graduated 1,049 students,[104] while the smaller winter class graduated 367.[105] Still, there are no fewer than three formal levels of bureaucracy that must be negotiated before curriculum changes can be approved by the commandant (Figure 6). This does not include the numerous deputies that recommended changes must be vetted through before decision-makers advance the change to the next level. As depicted below, the blocks in blue illustrate the academic levels that directly govern the CGSOC; all for a

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[104]U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, "10-01 Graduation Ceremony" U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, http://www.cgsc.edu/events/Graduation/ILEGraduation1001.asp (accessed November 15, 2010).

[105]U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. "10-02 Graduation Ceremony," Command and General Staff College, http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/Events/Graduation/ILEGraduation0902.asp (accessed November 15, 2010).

full-time student body under 1,500. Such an organization is partly explained by the fact that academic departments compete with each other over the same resource—contact time with students.
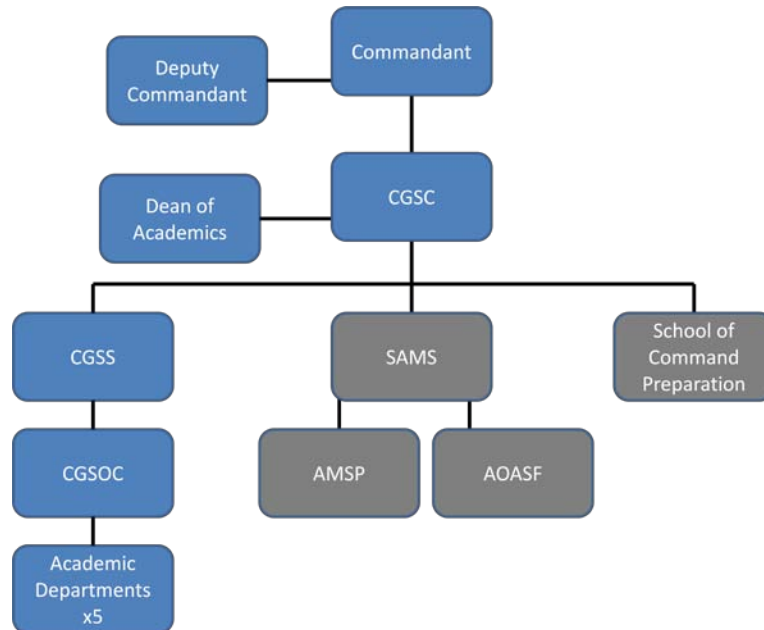

Figure 6: CGSC Organization

Of course, academic bureaucracy is not something confined to the CGSC. A recent study by the Goldwater Institute reveals that full-time administrators at the United States's top universities increased by 39% from 1993-2007.[106] Figures in the United Kingdom are even more startling with a 33% increase between 2003-2008.[107] Such oversight is starting to show signs of driving out some of the best professors. A highly-regarded University of Wisconsin physician

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[106]Goldwater Institute, "Top Universities Swell Bureaucracy at Taxpayer and Student Expense,"Goldwater Institute,http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/article/4944 (accessed November 3, 2010).

[107]Tariq Tahir, "The Irresistible Rise of Academic Bureaucracy," The UK Guardian, http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/mar/30/academic-bureaucracy-rise-managers-higher-education (accessed November 3, 2010).

recently resigned his research post over intrusions he attributed to the academic bureaucracy.[108] The implications are clear. Over-burdening bureaucracy stifles initiative among faculty members and makes them less innovative and responsive to students needs. The ALDS is designed to be a "flexible" framework capable of producing "agile and adaptive" leaders for our army.[109] Such a goal requires the institutions charged with developing such leaders be flexible as well.

The CGSC curriculum is also bound to the Accountable Instruction System (AIS). Ideally a system designed to ensure compliance with military education standards set by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as regional accreditation bodies, the AIS ensures "graduates gain the knowledge, skills, and attributes of the CGSC programs they attend."[110] Despite its intentions as an assessment tool, the AIS has become a curriculum development process. Colonel Jeffrey Gobel describes the AIS as a four phase process "by which school and department directors, course authors, and faculty should develop and document courseware for their respective curricula."[111] While such a process creates the curriculum that exists today, the AIS inhibits the creation of a context-based and horizontally integrated curriculum. Rather than viewing the CGSOC experience as a program in its entirety, the AIS instead views CGSOC as a series of courses. Such a process reinforces the hierarchal structure of CGSS and offers no incentive to develop a program of instruction that integrates departments horizontally.

In addition to the academic administration problems, the CGSOC is also bound by the conservative nature of its curriculum. As Turner reported, the CGSOC curriculum is respectably balanced between what he called "operational themes" and "non-operational themes"

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[108]Sullivan, Thomas, "University of Wisconsin Physician Resigns over Bureaucracy," Policy and Medicine, http://www.policymed.com/2010/08/university-of-wisconsin-physician-resigns-over-bureaucracy.html (accessed November 3, 2010).

[109]ALDS, 15.

[110]Jeffrey J. Goble, "Wants and Needs: SAMS' Relationship with the Army" (AOASF Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2008), 25.

[111]Goble, 25.

representing 45% and 55% respectively (Table 1).[112] However, when the operational themed instruction is evaluated in isolation, the results are insightful. Despite nearly seven years of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, Turner found an astonishing 65% of the CGSOC core curriculum was focused on major combat operations.[113] The implications of this finding are significant. The core curriculum is where most of the instruction on the operational environment takes place. Indeed, graduates of the core curriculum are expected to "analyze the likely impact of threats, challenges, and opportunities in the operational environment and the international security environment."[114] One can reasonably ask how well recent graduates of CGOSC are meeting this objective in an operational environment dominated by irregular war rather than major combat operations.

Table 1. Turner's Findings

		Op Themed	Non-Op Themed	Operational Themes				
				PME	LI	Peace	IW	MCO
ILE (total)	CGSS	45%	55%	1%	1%	1%	17%	25%
Core	CGSS	31%	69%	3%	1%	1%	6%	20%
AOWC	CGSS	65%	35%	0%	2%	0%	28%	35%
AMSP	SAMS	47%	53%	4%	4%	1%	13%	25%
TCDP	PCC	49%	51%	0%	0%	0%	44%	5%

*Operational Themes expressed as percentages of total curriculum

		Operational Themes				
		PME	LI	Peace	IW	MCO
ILE (total)	CGSS	2%	2%	2%	38%	56%
Core	CGSS	10%	3%	3%	19%	65%
AOWC	CGSS	0%	3%	0%	43%	54%
AMSP	SAMS	9%	9%	2%	28%	53%
TCDP	PCC	0%	0%	0%	90%	10%

*Only includes the Operational Themed Instruction

Army and Joint Doctrine indicate that a thorough understanding of the operational environment can only occur by understanding it as a system of systems. Each operational variable in PMESII-PT represents a system in itself that must be understood individually and how it

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[112]Turner, 8.

[113]Ibid, 9.

[114]U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, "C100 Theme Advance Sheet," CGSC Blackboard, https://courses.leavenworth.army.mil/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=_2951_1 (accessed November 3, 2010).

relates to the environment as a whole. A curriculum that spends nearly two-thirds of its operationally themed instruction on major combat operations overemphasizes study of the military-related systems and diminishes the importance of the political, social, and economic systems that are critical to the contemporary military officer. Yet, the answer to this problem is not to simply add to the bureaucracy by creating additional classes or departments, but to reconsider how knowledge is learned by the student. Instituting a thematic-based curriculum that considers themes inspired from current doctrine will encourage the existing departments to work cooperatively and in an integrated manner rather than competitively and disjointed.

Conclusion

As Merewether Lewis had to do over 200 years ago, contemporary military officers must ensure they understand their operational environment. Some officers, like General Petraeus, are fortunate to attend top-tier graduate schools where they can more fully explore subjects like history, economics, and political science and get out of their "intellectual comfort zones."[115] However, this is not possible for the vast majority of the officer corps. As such, current military academic institutions must do a better job at ensuring graduates possess not only the knowledge of their curriculum, but an applicable understanding of that knowledge.

Making a curriculum more responsive to the students and society it serves is not a new problem. As Fredrick Rudolph wrote, major U.S. colleges faced a similar problem at the turn of the 20th century when an increase in immigrants and an expanding economy demanded an increase in a more practical education. "The classics were gone," Rudolph stated, "but vocationalism enlarged its domain."[116] Students needed to be taught skills that would be relevant in a changing workplace. Accordingly, college curriculums became more skill based. Similarly, the Army has built educational institutions designed to produce leaders capable of operating at a certain level or performing certain tasks. This necessary practice continues today and is evidenced in the Army's ATLDP and ALDS studies. However, military officers are increasingly being asked to think independently, creatively, and critically. True understanding can only be achieved through a synthesis of information where instructional lessons are integrated together along central themes.

As the ALDS makes clear, understanding the operational environment is a key component in producing leaders that can operate in complex and ambiguous situations. As such, the CGSOC must stress its importance throughout the ten-month experience. The current CGSOC

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[115] Petraeus.

[116] Rudolph, 215.

curriculum devotes a mere two hours to the subject, and does not demonstrate how the operational environment represents the "stage" on which all activity is conducted. Such a passing reference illustrates the larger problem with the CGSOC curriculum. Rather than an integrated and comprehensive curriculum, the CGSS, like many other colleges, is responsive to the academic departments that comprise it. Curriculum developers reside within the academic departments and compete for resources with each other. There is little incentive to cooperate as precious jobs, funding, and influence are tied to the amount of hours each department contributes to the overall CGSOC experience. Developing a thematic-based curricula under the close direction of the CGSS incentivizes cooperation and ensures that the material taught is integrated among academic departments and tied to the needs of the Army and the student.

The operational environment is but one, albeit important, example of where military officers must establish an adequate understanding. Other aspects of military operations such as operational logistics, campaign planning, and joint integration all require an interdisciplinary understanding of a variety of subjects to successfully execute. However, none of this can be accomplished in a vacuum. There is a context to all aspects of military operations, and that context is defined by the operational environment.

Although improving, military officers still too often struggle in their understanding of the operational environment. In part, this is due to the fact that certain systems of the operational environment are foreign to officers indoctrinated in the art and science of warfare. Political, social, and economic aspects of the environment are not addressed at the Army's lieutenant and captain level courses. As the terminal point of the vast majority of officer's formal education, the CGSOC must ensure that graduates leave Fort Leavenworth with a better understanding of the operational environment.

As academic bureaucracy makes any learning institution less than flexible at changing course content, one must start elsewhere to facilitate a student's understanding of an operational environment. Recognizing, as doctrine instructs, that understanding emerges through a synthesis

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of knowledge obtained from a variety of sources, the CGSOC curriculum could be better organized to encourage such understanding. A thematic-based curriculum is a way of better organizing the curriculum.

Establishing themes based in contemporary doctrine and organizing lessons appropriately sets the proper stage for an officer's learning. The existing teaching team-based method of instruction leads well to integrating lessons between academic departments who must be encouraged to do so. As evidenced by the successful application of thematic curriculums in business and medical schools, students gain a better understanding of the context of the subject matter they are studying and can better apply that knowledge in other situations. Such must be the same goals of the Army's field grade officers. Knowledge alone is insufficient. The knowledge must be able to be transferred to other situations through understanding. Education is a vital component of an officer's development. In a society where a culture of un-intellectualism persists, the Army officer corps must be seen as a sanctuary of intellectual thought.

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